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By GENE SHUMATE

THOSE who follow news about Government contracts are alarmed about a Defense Department memorandum setting up ground rules so legislators can get certain contract information before the press and consequently the general public.

Defense contractors recently have been tightening up their security on such information for fear of getting in trouble.

And the Securities and Exchange Commission is well-aware that "leaking" of contract information from Government sources could be a gold mine for the speculator.

The memo is from Norman S. Paul, Assistant Secretary of Defense for legislative affairs to Nils A. Lennartson, Deputy Defense Secretary for Public Affairs.

On the surface, it appears to be a friendly gesture to Congress. What could make a Congressman happier than releasing news of a local fat contract to constituents through a local news medium?

Aviation Daily, the first of the press to level a big blast at this policy, said Congress gets such contract information 72 hours or even days in advance.

A Defense Department spokesman told me yesterday that Congressmen frequently get the news first, but he denied knowledge of any case where there was a 12-hour

But, he said, the possibility exists.

A Senator told me yesterday that he's going to quickly look into the entire situation.